

2022 Virginia Annual Conference Report

The 240th session of the Virginia Annual Conference was held on June 16 – 18, 2022 at the convention center in Hampton, Virginia. The theme for the conference was “United as One in Worship”; guided by the bible scripture of John 4:24, which reads, “God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth.” After two years of experiencing conference virtually, more than 3,000 members of the Virginia Annual Conference were excited to join together in person, as faithful Christians dedicated to serving God and furthering the Methodist movement.

Over the three-day period, conference members voted on committee reports prepared by hard-working individuals at the conference level; elected future leaders of the United Methodist Church and conducted business for one of the largest conferences in the Country. Actions and decisions which may be of the most interest to our congregation are listed below.

District Initiative - Effective July 1, 2022, Virginia has eight newly formed UMC districts. Previously, our church belonged to the Alexandria District, and now our church is part of the Northern Virginia District. The NoVa District combines the prior Alexandria District and Arlington District together. This is not a huge change for our region, as we have always worked closely with our bi-district friends. Even so, there has been much work done for the merger and there will be a great deal of organizing required on the district level going forward. Our district will continue to be led by our current District Superintendent, The Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert. The NoVa District has a beautiful new logo, deep in meaning, which will be shared with the congregation in the near future.

Request for Declaratory Decisions Regarding Timely Resolution of a Complaint- Some of you may have heard rumors regarding a “disruption” on the floor of Annual Conference that occurred on Friday morning. As a brief history, one clergy member in our conference has been under complaint for nearly three years and a second has been under complaint for about 18 months, both having had charges filed against them for violating The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church by performing same sex weddings. Normally, a complaint is resolved within 90 days, or in extraordinary circumstances, a maximum of 180 days. Because there has been no resolution, many believe that these individuals have been denied the right to a fair and speedy trial and recognize the anguish they have suffered because of it. In an effort to seek clarification about the broken process they have endured, a motion was made for the Virginia Annual Conference to petition the Judicial Council for declaratory decisions to answer questions about the complaint process as a means to move things forward. The motion was ruled out of order by Bishop Lewis. Several Points of Order were made to “appeal the decision of the chair” and Bishop Lewis ruled that this process was not the business of the Annual Conference, she could not discuss a pending complaint and that her ruling was not appealable. Bishop Lewis followed up her ruling with a prayer. During the prayer, a gathering of clergy and laity came forward in front of the stage in support of this simple motion asking for clarity by the highest ruling court in the United Methodist Church, the Judicial Council. After the prayer, this unplanned, Spirit-led group voiced their protest

by quietly singing one verse of Spirit of the Living God. Overall, there were several hundred people in the front of the delegation and many more standing in support at their seats. The group was respectful yet firm in their conviction. Ultimately, after prayer and consultation, Bishop Lewis allowed the body to vote and the motion for the request for Declaratory Decisions was affirmed. It will be properly forwarded by the Virginia Conference Secretary to the Judicial Council.

Mission Service - On Friday afternoon the membership celebrated the many areas the Virginia Conference is in mission throughout our state, the country, and the world. We learned that 18,560 UMCOR kits, valued at \$298,724, were donated to Mission Central in Pennsylvania and 12,611 pounds of food was collected for food banks across the conference. During the service, the Holy Rollers and youth members helped collect the Conference offering, which at last count totaled \$122,000. The Conference offering benefits both local and international mission projects to nurture leadership. Donations are still being accepted, and individuals may give at <https://www.vaumcdonations.org/product/annual-conference-offering>. When speaking about missions, the Rev. RJ Jun quoted a very compelling African proverb, which states “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Holy Rollers - On a personal note to our congregation, Tim Grembowski joined the Holy Rollers team in cycling to Annual Conference this year. The Holy Rollers is a group of laypeople and clergy who bike for two days to attend Annual Conference each year. This year the group biked 170 miles from Fredericksburg to Hampton. The purpose of the journey is to raise funds for the Conference mission offering, encourage fellowship across the state and offer opportunities to increase fitness and well-being. The group is always looking for new riders! You are invited to join the Holy Rollers on their ride next year.

Episcopal Nominee - Many of you may know the Rev. Tom Berlin, pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon, who has been a faithful leader in Northern Virginia for many years and instrumental in moving the United Methodist Church toward full inclusion. By an overwhelmingly majority vote and standing ovation by the Conference delegation, Rev. Berlin was endorsed as a nominee for the office of bishop. Rev. Berlin stated, “I am not running for bishop. I am simply making myself available for discernment alongside other candidates. But your endorsement is one of the most remarkable honors of my life.”

Children and Youth Ministries - An exciting movement happened on Saturday morning whereas a motion was made for funds to be directed in the Conference budget specifically toward children and youth ministries. The request came too late to be considered by the Conference for the 2023 budget; however, the Holy Spirit led individual churches and all districts to come before the altar and pledge their support to fund the children and youth initiative in 2023, rather than wait for the 2024 budget. The handwritten pledges were counted and a total of \$66,200 was promised to the Conference to be invested in our children and youth. Haymarket Church pledged \$250 toward the fund. This was truly a special moment and worthy of praise.

Beyond the business, all members enjoyed worship opportunities to be united as one across the state, including bible studies, music ministry, the recognition of mission works in multiple districts, the honoring of retiring clergy and celebrating the ordination of new clergy.